

The Globally Competent Student

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What characteristics would a globally competent student possess? What does this student know upon graduation day that a student without this sort of education does not? For some students, all or most of these characteristics are ones that s/he will find ways to develop even if the resources are lacking. For others, they must be convinced of the need to develop global competence. It is the charge of the administrators who decide, the faculty who teach, the legislators who fund, and the potential employers [private sector leaders] who motivate, to leave no doubts in the student's mind about the importance of becoming a globally competent student. Our objective, as NASULGC institutions, is to develop globally competent undergraduate and graduate students who will become globally competent citizens.

Five Characteristics of a Globally Competent Student

1. Has a diverse and knowledgeable worldview

As graduate of a globally competent university, the student develops a conceptual framework that informs the way he/she looks at the world. The student continually uses this framework to analyze and compare political, cultural, economic, historical, environmental, scientific and technological developments. The student no longer views the world through a single cultural lens and is able to identify and appreciate various viewpoints. While the globally competent student recognizes and values cultural differences, the student is also aware of the growing interconnectivity of the world and of the necessity of his/her ability to function within it.

But where does this diverse and knowledgeable worldview come from and how is it constructed? While the materials to build this framework are made available to the student through general education offerings, foreign language courses, and study abroad programs, what really strengthens this framework is the globally competent university's curriculum, which infuses all things international into all possible realms of the university. The university's curriculum has to be widely internationalized, regardless of department, at the undergraduate, graduate and professional school levels. By so doing, the globally competent university's curricula and faculty ensure the diverse and knowledgeable worldview of the globally competent student.

2. Comprehends international dimensions of his/her major field of study

The globally competent student not only constructs an overall framework to inform his/her overall worldview, but also seeks to understand the international dimensions of his/her chosen major. While some disciplines may appear to be immune to the need for internationalization because they are deemed international by nature (e.g., Anthropology) or produce the same results regardless of culture or location (e.g., Physics), the globally competent student recognizes the need for the individual within the discipline to be internationally aware. The student therefore

actively seeks out faculty members and curriculum offerings that fulfill this need, regardless of discipline.

3. Communicates effectively in another language and/or cross-culturally

The globally competent student recognizes that while English is often considered the world's dominant language, it may not always, nor should always be the case. The case can be made for three types of language and communications competencies: at the specialist level, at the general proficiency level, and at the cross-cultural communication level. At the specialist level, students are studying foreign language with the specific intent of becoming specialists in one or more non-English languages. The demand for such specialists is ever increasing and universities must do everything possible to recruit and retain faculty and students in these programs.

Most students can become – and should be encouraged to become - proficient in at least one language other than English. The globally competent student recognizes that knowledge of a foreign language opens the door to a more in-depth understanding of the cultures and peoples associated with that language. As a result of foreign language competency, even if fluency is not fully achieved, the student gains basic cross-cultural communication skills by learning about other countries and cultures.

Due to the lack of emphasis on foreign language acquisition at the elementary and secondary levels, achieving cross-cultural communication competency may be one of the most challenging competencies for a student to gain. Few courses are taught in this subject and few students, outside of specific departments, take these courses.

4. Exhibits cross-cultural sensitivity and adaptability

In addition to foreign language skills, the globally competent student exhibits both cross-cultural sensitivity and adaptability because s/he takes advantage of opportunities to interact with diverse individuals. In doing so, the globally competent student questions assumptions and challenges stereotypes of his/her own and of others. Examples of these meaningful interactions and experiences are membership in one or more internationally oriented student organizations, involvement in activities that bring together international and American students, and participation in an overseas experience through study, internship, or work programs. The overseas experience that not only uproots the student but also immerses him/her within the host country's culture is critical to the development of global competence. While immersed in another culture, the student has perhaps the greatest opportunity to assess his/her own assumptions about the world and his/her own culture. Upon return, the student can no longer view the world only through one lens and builds his/her conceptual framework.

5. Carries global competencies throughout life

The globally competent student recognizes the worth of international understanding for its own sake as well as for his/her own personal fulfillment. The importance of being globally competent therefore does not rest solely on the promise that it guarantees he/she will get a better job upon graduation. The globally competent student builds upon this established framework throughout life. As the result of an education from a globally competent university, the student adds the competencies personally gained to benefit of the greater public good. The student becomes a globally competent citizen that is equipped to contribute on both a local and global scale.

How to....?

How then, to develop and nurture students so that they become globally competent participants in this world that is globalizing more rapidly than we can imagine? If the learning, discovery, and public engagement missions of our institutions are kept in mind, the following methods may be used to do a better job of educating our students.

Obtaining *diverse and knowledgeable worldviews* can happen in the classroom, either in general education (GenEd) classes or elsewhere, outside of the classroom and off-campus. The number of international credits required in GenEd can be increased, provided such classes are available or can be made available. Students can look beyond their major to find classes in other disciplines, possibly developing a minor in international studies for example. An international capstone experience could be required. Considerably more directed interactions between U.S. students and international students could be developed. However, educating students to have a broad worldview has to start much earlier, at the K-12 level, meaning that our teacher training programs have to include and allow for international education to become a significant part of the offerings of our Colleges of Education.

The responsibility for expanding the *international dimensions of the major* rests almost solely on faculty shoulders. Faculty must be internationally experienced and teaching courses with international content. Use can be made of visiting international faculty, speakers, and even international students. Students should be able to access international research and internship opportunities; the institutions must be proactive in finding such for students. The globally competent university, of course, should be poised to provide support and offer incentives to faculty to become internationally experienced.

The issue of *communication*, whether in another language and certainly cross-culturally, is a divisive issue at the faculty and institutional level. Whether a second language should be required, how to measure competency in that language, how to fit language into professional curricula, and what is “lost” by requiring a language are all pieces of a long-standing debate among academics. By developing a three-pronged strategy, as noted earlier, that encompasses specialist, general proficiency, and cross cultural communication options, an institution would be able to address the issue of “global literacy for effective communication”.

For students to have *cross-cultural sensitivity* they must be able to understand and work with others and be able to make comparisons across cultures. This can only be obtained through interactions with others - participation in campus activities, study abroad programs, work experiences, language classes and the like.

Finally, in order to carry *global competency through a lifetime*, students must become lifelong learners, forever engaged in the news of the world, learning and discovering along the way, and being involved insomuch as possible with the world. This can be through community and school activities, work, or personal actions to remain globally literate. They can be involved in continuing education programs, extension efforts, outreach, travel, and volunteering. We must continually emphasize that our K-12 teachers, our public officials, and our business leaders develop more international awareness and savvy. Globally competent students will become globally competent citizens.

Best practices....to be elicited during Costa Mesa meeting.

Best practices were mentioned by:

Michigan State – the president sends a welcome letter to every incoming freshman telling them to be sure to take advantage of study abroad programs.